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EPA delays dump test in Passaic Twp.

By LAWRENCE HACKETT

Officials from National Gypsum Co. are still awaiting a green light from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to begin on-site studies of four asbestos dumpsites in Passaic Township, Morris County.

"I'd like to get in there," said Lawrence Worden, an attorney for the Dallas-based company that operated a factory in the Millington section of the township for 22 years. "The longer I wait, the more my costs go up."

National Gypsum representatives met with local officials in late January to outline their plans, which stem from a consent order signed with the EPA. The four sites were put on the national superfund list in 1982.

At the time of the meeting, National Gypsum expected EPA approval for on-site testing within several weeks. That approval, however, will not be granted for at least two weeks, EPA officials said last week. Worden said EPA officials told him they were awaiting comments from the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Last week, DEP spokesman James Staples said the comments have been forwarded to the EPA, but he did not know what position the DEP took. He characterized the company as "very cooperative."

Worden said it is critical to move onto the sites—three of them in or surrounded by the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge—as soon as possible or "it's going to be too messy to do anything" following the spring thaw.

National Gypsum manufactured asbestos shingles at its Millington plant from 1963 to 1978. All four locations (the largest next to the old factory) were used as dump sites for cracked and unusable asbestos siding. One of the sites also has evidence of paint solvent.

Local officials believe there may be other dump sites around the township since many residents used Gypsum's damaged shingles as fill.

The study is being done to determine how to prevent the asbestos from seeping into local groundwater. Such site research has been unable to find other known asbestos in any health hazard.

EPA officials are expected to conduct tests this spring on two handfuls that are particularly located within the 4,000-acre refuge in Chatham, Passaic and Harding townships.

Both the Harding and Chatham townships have been closed for years. The tests will be made to determine what is seeping out of the landfills and what effect it may be having on the refuge, Koch said.

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